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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001474

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: FIRST VENEZUELAN NATIONAL FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS

CLASSIFIED BY: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS FOR REASONS 1.4 (D

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SUMMARY

1. (U) AT A HUMAN RIGHTS FORUM ORGANIZED BY THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AND JUSTICE (MIJ) GOV SPEAKERS DISMISSED ALLEGATIONS OF VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE DISTURBANCES FROM FEBRUARY 27 - MARCH 5. SENIOR MIJ OFFICIALS CONTENDED THAT HUMAN RIGHTS ARE MULTIFACETED, AND THE GOV IS ADVANCING SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHTS; SECURITY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT HUMAN RIGHT OF ALL PEOPLE; THE DEMONSTRATORS VIOLATED THE PUBLIC'S RIGHT TO TRANSPORTATION, AND WORK. PRESIDENT CHAVEZ TOLD THE AUDIENCE THAT THE GOV'S SOCIAL MISSIONS (EDUCATION, HEALTH CARE) "HAVE OPENED A NEW HORIZON FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, RECOGNIZED NOW BY THE WORLD." END SUMMARY.

2. (U) THE MIJ DIRECTORATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZED THE "FIRST NATIONAL FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE BOLIVARIAN CONSTITUTION OF VENEZUELA OF 1999" ON APRIL 27 AND 28. POLOFF ATTENDED SOME OF THE PROCEEDINGS. SPEAKERS INCLUDED THE ENTIRE LEADERSHIP OF THE MIJ, ALONG WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER GOV ORGANISMS WITH HUMAN RIGHTS PORTFOLIOS, INCLUDING THE ARMED FORCES AND THE PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE. A NUMBER OF SPEAKERS FROM GOV SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND MISSIONS SPOKE ABOUT ECONOMIC HUMAN RIGHTS. PLANNING FOR THE FORUM BEGAN IN JANUARY, ACCORDING TO MIJ DG OF HUMAN RIGHTS MAYERLING ROJAS VILLASMIL, BEFORE ALLEGED VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS BY STATE SECURITY FORCES IN FEBRUARY AND MARCH.

INTERIOR MINISTER LUCAS RINCON

3. (C) MINISTER OF INTERIOR AND JUSTICE LUCAS RINCON OPENED THE FORUM WITH AN AGGRESSIVELY DEFENSIVE SPEECH, CALLING THE BOLIVARIAN CONSTITUTION "ONE OF THE MOST ADVANCED IN THE WORLD WITH REGARD TO HUMAN RIGHTS." HE ACCUSED THE OPPOSITION OF USING HUMAN RIGHTS TO DAMAGE THE REPUTATION OF THE GOV INTERNATIONALLY. WHILE ADMITTING THAT THE AMBITIOUS GOALS OF THE CONSTITUTION HAVE NOT YET BEEN FULFILLED, HE ASSURED THE AUDIENCE THAT "THE BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION IS WORKING ARDUOUSLY TO ALLOW THE PEOPLE TO ENJOY THE ELEMENTAL RIGHTS SUCH AS LIFE, HEALTH, EDUCATION AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, WHICH HAVE BEEN CASTRATED FOR ALL THESE YEARS..." RINCON ATTACKED THE "HYPOCRISY" OF OPPOSITION COMPLAINTS, AND PRAISED GOV STEPS TO PROVIDE SOCIO-POLITICAL RIGHTS TO THE PEOPLE.

DIRECTOR GENERAL OF HUMAN RIGHTS

4. (U) IN HER SPEECH, MAYERLING ROJAS VILLASMIL, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE MIJ FOR HUMAN RIGHTS TRIED TO RECAPTURE THE MORAL HIGH GROUND BY DENOUNCING THE OPPOSITION AS HYPOCRITES FOR COMPLAINING ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, AFTER YEARS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES UNDER THE AD AND COPEI GOVERNMENTS. SHE ADMITTED THERE WERE SOME PROBLEMS, AND CALLED FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR TRAINING PROGRAMS. SHE CLAIMED THAT NOW WAS THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY THAT THE GOV WAS PUBLICLY TALKING ABOUT IMPROVING HUMAN RIGHTS. SHE SAID HER OFFICE HAD BEEN PLANNING THE EVENT FOR FOUR MONTHS, INDICATING THE EVENTS OF FEBRUARY AND MARCH WERE INCONVENIENTLY RAISING BRUTALITY ISSUES IN A FORUM DESIGNED TO SHOW OFF SOCIAL PROGRESS.

VICE MINISTER CARLOS BETTIOL

5. (U) VICE MINISTER FOR INTERNAL RELATIONS AND CITIZEN SECURITY, CARLOS BETTIOL PRAISED THE GOV FOR ITS MULTI-FACETED VIEW OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AND THE ADVANCED NATURE OF THE BOLIVARIAN CONSTITUTION. HE ATTACKED THE OPPOSITION AND INDEPENDENT HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS FOR QUESTIONING THE GOV'S DEDICATION TO HUMAN RIGHTS, AND CHARGED THAT THE MEDIA AND OPPOSITION ALSO VIOLATE HUMAN RIGHTS. WHILE ADMITTING THAT THE STATE HAD GREATER RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, HE EMPHASIZED THE PROTECTION OF COLLECTIVE, AND NOT INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS.

16. (U) BETTIOL TOLD THE AUDIENCE THAT WITHOUT SECURITY NO

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LIES ACCUSATIONS
AGAINST VENEZUELAN SECURITY FORCES, DEFENDED THEIR ACTIONS,
AND ACCUSED THE MEDIA OF EXAGGERATING ISOLATED INCIDENTS. HE
SAID CLAIMS OF TORTURES AND DISAPPEARANCES ARE ALL LIES.
BETTIOL ALSO ASSERTED THAT THE DEMONSTRATORS FAILED IN THEIR
OBLIGATIONS AS CITIZENS BY VIOLATING OTHER PEOPLE'S RIGHTS TO
TRANSPORTATION AND WORK BY BLOCKING STREETS IN THE
DISTURBANCES FROM FEB. 27 TO MARCH 5.

PRESIDENT CHAVEZ CLOSES

17. (U) PRESIDENT CHAVEZ CLOSED THE EVENT ON APRIL 28, AGAIN
PRAISING THE ADVANCED NATURE OF THE CONSTITUTION. HE POINTED
OUT THAT DESPITE "EVERYTHING THAT HAS OCCURRED HERE: COUP
D'ETAT, THREATS TO SECURITY, TO SOVEREIGNTY AND DEFENSE, THIS
GOVERNMENT... HAS NOT SUSPENDED EVEN ONE CONSTITUTIONAL
GUARANTEE." HE CLAIMED THAT THE SOCIAL MISSIONS THE GOV HAS
INITIATED "HAVE OPENED A NEW HORIZON FOR HUMAN RIGHTS,
RECOGNIZED NOW BY THE WORLD."

COMMENT

18. (C) IN THIS CONFERENCE, THE GOV ESTABLISHED ITS VISION
AND DEFINITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE
SPEAKERS INDICATE THAT THE ORIGINAL INTENTION WAS TO
HIGHLIGHT ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE GOV'S EDUCATION AND HEALTH CARE
MISSIONS. OFFICIALS REPEATEDLY REFERRED TO THE BOLIVARIAN
CONSTITUTION AS THE BASIS BY WHICH THE GOV WILL MEASURE
RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, THOUGH THEY DID NOT NEGLECT TO NOTE
THEY WOULD ADHERE TO INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED STANDARDS.
SIGNIFICANTLY, THEY RAISED COLLECTIVE RIGHTS ABOVE INDIVIDUAL
RIGHTS, BLAMED THE VICTIMS OF ALLEGED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS
BY STATE SECURITY AGENTS FOR VIOLATING THE RIGHTS OF THE
GENERAL PUBLIC, AND ELEVATED SECURITY ABOVE OTHER RIGHTS.
THIS WAS A TIP OF THE HAT TOWARD HUMAN RIGHTS -- A GESTURE --
AND CONTRASTS STARKLY WITH THE GOV'S PERFORMANCE. THE
ABSENCE OF ANY SIGNS OF REMORSE OR RECONSIDERATION, DESPITE
INTERNATIONAL CONCERN REGARDING THE ALLEGED VIOLATIONS THAT
OCCURRED FEBRUARY 27 - MARCH 5, SENDS THE MESSAGE TO THE
OPPOSITION THAT THE GOV IS PREPARED TO DEFEND ITSELF BY ANY
MEANS NECESSARY.
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